FIXIN' THINGS

FOR CHARLES

I give you snatches of my boyhood
in exchange for pictures of yours.
Often you voice difficult memories
that I keep silent regarding home.

In retrospect, it wasn't the sound
of my mother crying that hurt most,
it was the sound of my father leaving
his marriage, his house, his familiars.

In the debris of ruptured bloodlines,
in the domestic violence of our families,
in the turbulence we call love was bred
the possibility of my dysfunction, and yours.

I tell you of the hatred
that seized the boyhoods
of my brother and me,
how we fought violently in public,

drawing blood as if it would
allow us to see
what was wrong with it,
with him, with me.

We are men now, he with a family;
I have a cat and a thousand poems.
We have accepted what we can of ourselves:
my homo life, his hyper masculinity, the same difference.

How does the world see my brother?
How is he treated, how is he approached?
What dreams does he keep from childhood?
What does he look like as a father?

I know little of this about him
as I rush from airports to hotels to podiums.
I know little of this as I go about
publicly advocating for Black brotherhood.

So when I am with you, my friend,
and we open our hearts to one another,
I wonder why I have never
done this with my blood brother?

You and I afford ourselves the space to release
the anguish; across a simple kitchen table
we examine scars, we teach ourselves to make power
and beauty of scars, a skill we learn with great effort.

Why I have never created such a space
for speaking to my brother, and how to now,
now as I move toward the middle years
losing more than I gain to live.

How to address this is the dream that eludes my blue nights.
O sweet dream, when will you come to me with answers?
Must I beg? Of the many issues that concern me,
how to speak to my brother is a mystery.

Is it a new language we must learn?
Is it a miracle sign that foretells of us
speaking in tongues and finally understanding?
These are the elusive questions that foil me.